

The Journey from Traditional Character Concept through to their Presentation and Representation in 3D Forms

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Introduction

Animation started with the animator taking pencil to paper and creating movement from their bare hands. Throughout the year's technology and technique have evolved to animated pieces that are created via a computer and are completely digital in production. With how technology has developed the creation of these movies does that mean that the quality has changed as some would say that the effort put into today's animation is nothing compared to when it was all made by hand.

In this essay the world of animation is going to be flipped on its head and find out how much the technology that went into making them influenced them to be the pieces that they were back then and today. Also taking into consideration the characters and how they can be taken from their original concepts to then be made into 3D. Through analysis and research some examples considered including *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (2018) and the discussion on the interpretation of the Disney Princesses being created into 3D and how this impacted the watching audience. For instance, taking the first Disney feature length movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), released in 1937 and was created using hand drawn pieces that were put together to make the movements which all together told the story to the audience watching. Would the story change if the movie was created using today's technology? According to Booker (Booker, 2010, pg. 01) "One could, in fact, make a very good argument that the first genuine feature length children's film was Walt Disney's inaugural feature, the 1937 classic *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). Meanwhile, that this film was also the first animated feature is no coincidence but indicates the close relationship that has existed ever since between children's film and animated film." The developments may influence changes to the piece as the ability to create more is more accessible. However, if this were to be re-made would the audience still appreciate the movie as much as the original. How the story is still crucial no matter what is used to create it or what characters are acting in it. The way that it is all put together is crucial in order to create a story that would gain the interest of the audience watching. Mentioned by Catmull (Catmull, 2008, pg. 03) "A movie contains literally tens of thousands of ideas. They're in the form of every sentence; in the performance of each line; in the design of characters, sets, and backgrounds; in the locations of the camera; in the colours, the lighting, the pacing." Explaining how crucial all separate elements in a movie are in order to create the perfect piece. Having to consider not just one thing but a collection, including character to make a story.

Have breakthroughs in technology contributed to the type of film made today? *Moana* (2016) is a movie with a clear example of a film that relied on having the simulation of water being so realistic, would this have been achievable with traditional 2D animation to the same degree or would the story change? Would the restrictions be too much or would the creators be able to overcome and create their own interpretation of the story?

This would then relay to the audience and how their interest has changed and developed with the new technologies that have been used for these movies, questions raised about the viewing audience such as the colour being too much to handle for such a length as coloured film had only been seen in shorter movies. As explained by Booker (Booker, 2010, pg. 02) "*Snow White* is an absolutely charming film, though it is, in fact, a bit dated now, despite its supposedly timeless fairy-tale subject matter." The movies would be something familiar that the viewer would then want to see how it had been developed into something that was more than just words in a book but a moving picture, something rarely seen and such an experience to see. Booker (Booker, 2010, pg. 02) then continues to say that "The famous opening, which shows the opening of a book of fairy tales to

begin the story, was at the time reasonably clever (and appropriate, given the film opened a new chapter in cinema history)” Today the audience has developed into wanting to see something that hasn’t been seen before. A new subject that would take them out of their everyday lives and into the world of imagination. If the film is made from something already created it is made with a change added such as new technology used to bring it to the screen, developing from what they had made before for example still returning to the musical routes such as in their most recent Frozen 2 (2019) or bringing back the retro look in Wreck in Ralph (2012).

Problematic Developments

Disney over the years has evolved their style which can be seen as a positive as it shows how they have moved with the evolution of animation and the media world. Developing their own distinctive style that can now be recognised globally. Velarde (Velarde, 2010, pg. 30) mentions that “The concept of identity is significant.” Explaining that having a sense of identity is important in character to convey the right story and personality to the audience and create an appealing character that doesn’t get lost through story. This has been done in both 2D and 3D from the movies such as The Princess and the Frog (2008), the last 2D feature film and Moana (2016). The two movies can be seen to share similar styles. This is a perfect example of how Disney can use their 2D and still create the same style in 3D and not lose touch of the character in either forms. They can still convey the story no matter which media they are using.

With the creation of Wreck it Ralph 2 (2018) there was quite a discussion on how all Disney Princesses were to be made in 3D. After the film’s release many were made with the approval of the audience keeping the character and style that they were originally and how they had kept the image of certain princesses but still bringing them into today’s world. However, with characters such as Cinderella, discussions were had through online blog’s and videos that the true character had been lost in the final design. Today’s design for Disney character are youthful with larger eyes and soft complexions which worked for characters such as Ariel, a character known for having these features therefore being made into 3D was simple and not many changes needed to be had. The older characters are what caused curiosity for how Disney would create them.

The reason for the 2D concept is to capture the character in their state, how the artist wants to show off the character. Their personality will be emphasized by how the design is made; poses are usually used to show the artists what kind of character this will be. However, in Disney’s position they had full length films to get their inspiration from. Taking the characters from their original to then recreate them in 3D would seem like a simple job. It’s the same character. The personality and overall looks were almost lost from the transition from 2D to 3D. Looking back to Cinderella, a character known for being very mature and well caring for those around them. Their 2D look was still youthful but had distinctive features that would have her be recognisable to anyone. The 3D version looked completely different. However, when looking at other characters such as Mulan and Pocahontas, two character that a very well known for their own unique look still had their features that were created in 3D. They were still easily spotted in their new 3D version, even their personality were accurate from their small screen time. Cinderella on the other seemed like a brand-new character, not like the heroic and courageous character from the original 2D movie. It would seem as though Disney missed the mark when recreating this character. The process of creating this character had a loss of their original design and detracted from it too much and diluting the original iconic figure too much. Another character such as Rapunzel had lost their look and they were a 3D character originally. It seems as if Disney wanted to create a new youthful look for all of their

characters, even those that were 3D originally. Rapunzel looked more childish, making her lose her other highly thought of features, the parts of her that have her stand out against the other princesses.

The Artists

The transition from black and white to colour was a great worry. The early days of animation was in black and white, characters such as Betty Boop made her debut in no colour and it was unknown how the audience would take the great jump in technology. The overall painted look was Disney's look for the first few decades, looking back it can be seen as dull. The use of brighter colours was very little. In today's world of animation, the use of experimental colours and brighter looks are being used more and more. Catmull (Catmull, 2008, pg. 08) explains that "A lot of people look back at Disney's early days and say, "Look at the artists!" They don't pay attention to his technological innovations. But he did the first sound in animation, the first colour, the first compositing of animation with live action, and the first applications of xerography in animation production. He was always excited by science and technology." This can explain how much of a difference Walt Disney made to the animation world, bringing in new ideas and developing the way that animations are made and how they will be viewed and perceived by the audience.

The movie COCO (2017) comes to mind, the land of the dead would be thought of being very dark with no life. However, Disney took it upon themselves to reinterpret this, using the brightest colours and lighting. The audience today look for the new and different. Tangled (2010) used the lanterns to create the beautiful scene of them rising into the sky. Such scenes draw the audience in and have them wanting to see more. Most Disney films today take on a scene that includes such beauty in effects, enhancing on what they could create in 2D or in the early stages of 3D, following the physical laws such as with the lanterns and how they reflect upon the water and the light flickering as they rise. Amidi (Amidi, 2011, pg. 04) adds that "Because colour is so charged with feeling and provokes such a strong response in an audience." Explaining that colour itself can tell a story and convey a character's mood with just its presence. How it can change an emotion in a scene almost instantly and change the way a character can be perceived.

Breaking the Mould of 2D

With the developments in technology today's feature films include many elements that couldn't be included in previous years. Disney's most recent original feature Moana broke many walls in modern technology, one being a film that is based solely around water and how it conveys certain emotions through its movement and behaviour. Clarke (Clarke, 2013, pg. 26) Explains that "Animation makes the familiar unfamiliar, allowing for a fresh view of what we know, of what we take for granted." Showing how animation can turn the everyday concept into something that we have never seen before and create something new from an idea that can be seen as overused and old. The connection it then has with the people throughout the movie, having to make the effect of them getting wet and the aftermath of that. Some may argue that the water and the fluidity has been seen in previous films. In Fantasia there are scenes of Mickey Mouse having great influence on water, making it rise and fall by his own hands. The technique of it all being hand drawn, being able to create the fluidity from creating the curves and movement with certain technique of how the water would crash against certain things and the later effect of said action. Even when Mickey is fully submerged the animator would then have to consider how his body weight would react to being in

the water. The sudden push that would send him in spirals, how that would change compared to being on dry land pushed by wind perhaps.

The connection to *Moana* (2016) have similar elements of connection but the argument still stands in terms of conveying emotion through the movement of the water. In the very beginning it shows a young *Moana* playing with the water, a scene that was released before the film was shown, a teaser to reel the audience in showing so much technique in a short clip of the movie. The way that it interacts with *Moana* playing with her hair and handing her the stone that then plays a major part in the film. In previous 3D films made by Disney there have been small interactions with water. *The Incredibles* (2004) is an example for when Ellen, Violet and Dash jump out of the plane to then land in the water. The effect of making their skin and their hair look wet was used and the changes in appearance can be seen. Ellen's usually perfectly styled hair had fallen to lay straight giving the perception that water had made effect to the physical object. However, in *Moana*, the sea is a main character in itself without the audience even realising. The film is based on travellers who search the sea to find land in which they will habitat for a while to then move on the search for something new. The sea is a character that helps the characters find their way throughout the movie and not just *Moana*. The movie *Aladdin* (1992) has a character that wouldn't have emotion in real life but in the movie plays a vital role. The Magic Carpet is a character found in the cave with the lamp and follows *Aladdin* throughout the rest of the movie. Without being able to speak the carpet convey's emotion through its movement and the way it holds itself. For example when the carpet is ecstatic it jumps and spreads out completely but to show sorrow and upset the carpet falls and becomes more of a schlump

Technique in 2D in terms of hair can be seen but not to the extent and the development of 3D. Even in the beginnings of *Snow White* (1937) her hair can be seen bouncing when she is dancing along with the Dwarfs. Only with *The Little Mermaid* (1989) was hair made into a character in itself. The way that it moves with the water and it would then react to being on dry land. A 2D character known for their hair is *Pocahontas* (1995), her hair that moves with the wind. Which was included in her 3D adaptation in *Ralph breaks the internet*. However, the reason why the characters had their hair tied up instead of having it down may be to show off more of their personality and have that easily translate to the audience without them even realising it. Characters like Jasmine from *Aladdin* (1992) may wear her hair up to show that she is more confident in herself and doesn't wish to hide herself from the world. A contrast would be with Violet in *The Incredibles*, in the beginning of the movie her hair is a cape to the world. Hiding her face to all those around her and as the movie progresses and she finds more about herself to like and she gets more confident with herself and her powers. Ackerman (Ackerman, 2011, pg. 10) shows that "Realism is a mode of visual and literary representation that privileges sight among the other senses because it is supposedly the most reliable or objective guide to the world that affects us." Therefore, the use of hair in all of these different ways, although could be restricted by the technology that is in existent they are mainly an extension of the character that the creators wish to show to the audience.

Some may argue that the way that 3D has evolved is not comparable to the 2D animation created back in the days of *Snow White*. The beginnings of 3D to some didn't show the developments and leaps that 2D took in their own beginning. Creating coloured pieces at longer lengths and being able to tell a story using moving pictures. A subject that hadn't really been seen before. Compared to a remake in a 3D platform. Clarke (Clarke, 2013, pg. 12) argues "For some, though, computer animation's development since 1995 – if we treat that year, which saw the release of *Toy Story*, as a watershed for the feature film industry's commitment to computer animation – has not evolved the same subtleties as hand drawn animation did in a shorter timeframe in the early twentieth century."

Suggesting that it is true for some that 2D has grown greater lengths when compared to the timeline of 3D developments. This argument could be undertaken by many and come out in an array of opinions, but it would depend on how someone views technology and picture.

Taking a Character from 2D to 3D

Disney Pixar have developed over their span of almost 30 years from their very first Toy Story (1995) movie and their most recent fourth sequel. Major changes can be spotted and there have been many developments from the main characters that have been in all movies to the new that join with each new addition. Catmull (Catmull, 2008, pg. 04) explains that "Pixar's customers expect to see something new every time." Saying that the animation studios aim to create a new piece of media with every movie to please the audience. This could be argued by the way the studios continues to create sequels for movies they first created over 20 years ago. Not being very original with their stories but still having the success with the following movies.

The very first Toy Story didn't focus on human beings as they hadn't figured out how to animate people at the creation of this movie. Instead, the audience will see more hand and feet shots as clothing was another issue that they had to face but weren't ready to tackle. The lighting also plays in hiding some flaws that the humans may have, from their clothing to subtle movements that they couldn't achieve. One element that shows how the studios has evolved with their technology are their animals. Something not everyone would notice as they are not a main character in either film but just a background character adding to the story. The first Toy Story has a dog that can be seen not looking lifelike to the actual being and the fur is something not really included on the animal but only added in forms of strokes on the body itself. The achievement that Pixar had made in creating any attempt at realistic forms is highly praised however, skip forward to 2019 and the fourth instalment, the cat that features for only a short time had people mistaking it for a real life being. The way that the studio has developed their technology can be pointed out by these two animals alone. What they could create at the time was ground-breaking in itself but then when compared with today's work the audience can then see that they never stopped when thinking of new ways to push forward. In terms of storytelling in the first Toy Story it can be seen to lack the emotional wealth that the later movies had, this may be because the studio was only testing the waters to see what they could create in that time alone. No-one knew what kind of success this movie would be. When compared to the next upcoming sequels the use of more emotional stories with the toys being abandoned when their kids have grown up and move on from playing with them tug on people's heartstrings. One reason being that the audience that have grown up with the movies can relate to the story even more with the sense of maturity coming from the storylines. Catmull (Catmull, 2008, pg. 05) writes that "The reality is kids do grow up, life does change, and sometimes you have to move on. Since the audience members know the truth of this, they can see that Woody has a real choice, and this is what grabs them." Bringing in the truth of what the creators of Toy Story were trying to convey when creating the emotional storylines throughout all movies.

With the introduction to 3D the creators wanted to make something that they couldn't in 2D. Examples of these go from Woody's shirt, how it folds and moves with him. The reflection of Buzz from inside his helmet. Giving the movie another reason to stand out against the already made 2D movies from Disney. The second instalment in the Toy Story (1999) franchise showed the developments that they had already made in the space of four years. More full character shots are used and there are more people in it compared to the first and of different looks without the worry of having to cover up their mistakes. With all of their sequels after the first movie the characters

would have had to be recreated and rebuilt again and again due to the software always changing and evolving, when they tried to use the previous characters they would only be met with error messages. This could be seen as an opportunity to recreate the characters with the new technology but with them having to keep the characteristics that they had previously made in the prior movies but to be able to elevate them even more. Velarde (Velarde, 2010, pg. 09) explains that “Even though we may be watching toys or cars that are brought to life, or monsters or even rats, these characters contain a quality of reality to which we can relate.” Pixar have been able to create all of these stories and have the audience believe that it is some form of reality. Giving them a sense of familiarity from their ideas as they were probably something that they would’ve thought of as a child brought to life.

With the creation of the most recent Toy Story 4 (2019) the character Bo Peep was brought back after not being seen since 1999. However, the character had a complete makeover from the second movie. With the steps in technology the creators were able to make her look more like a porcelain doll. The character can be a prime example of how much the company has changed and developed over the past 24 years. Taking the original character dawning a dress and being a character that was always in the background and didn’t have much say. Now is a character that is much stronger within themselves and have had their story elevated. Since the Me-Too movement the creators took it upon themselves to create a character that others would look up to and see the change that has been made from the first movie. This is an example of taking an already existing character and making the right changes to elevate the character in all good ways and for all the good reasons and not just to fit a mould that they have created for all of their characters.

Ackerman (Ackerman, 2011, pg. 19) mentions that “We might say that Disney has enthusiastically adopted this poetic observation as a marketing slogan.” Explaining that Pixar creating many movies over the years still fall back to creating sequels to their already very popular originals which even though may not be as successful as the prior production still has some guarantee of a returning audience as they would want to see the changes from the last and to grow up with the story. Having that familiarity would ensure that they will return to see what will happen next.

The Sequel Paradox

In the world of movie making a great deal of money making comes from the creation of sequels. Toy Story (1995) being a clear example of that. Shane Snow writes about the use of sequels throughout Hollywood and how they compare to their predecessor. Firstly comparing the jump that had been made in the number of sequels created. In 2008 the number was at 16 but then jumped to a higher 38 in 2016. Moving forward, saying that even though the number of sequels had raised up over a short span of time, in the theatre they earn less money than the originals at an average of -26.45%. Even though the sequels make less than the original they still make a lot more than the average movie released into Hollywood. However, in the box office sequels make more money. Why is that? It is because sequels are only made if the first movie is a huge success. Meaning that the creators put thought that if the original movie can make a larger sum of money then the sequel can make just as much or even beat it. Even though the sequels on average earn more than the original the review scores fall below than what the original had scored. On average at -4.45% the drop can first be seen little but when the first has been a huge success the audience would want to sequel to be better than the original. Falling back to Toy Story the movie reviews are a clear example of them falling even if they are more of a success. The first Toy Story earned \$373.6 Million and received a score of 8.3/10 on IMDB. The most recent Toy Story 4 went forward to earn \$1.073 Billion but then received a

score of 7.9/10. An example of a movie earning more success than the first but not having a score that beats the previous. The reason behind this? Could it be the fact that the audience that watched the original have grown with the series and want others to experience what they had as a child? Or is it the fact that Pixar themselves have grown and have a wider audience that will watch their movies no matter the review written.

Reception Theory

The reception theory created by Stuart Hall, explains that media texts are encoded and decoded. Starting with the producer who encodes messages and values into their media, for then the audience to decode it. An example of this in practise is the Pixar Theory, the audience over the years have come to the conclusion of all movies being connected somehow and in finding this out they have to observe each movie carefully to find the hidden easter eggs whether that being an illustration in the background or a character making a quick appearance in the background. The creators have got the audience thinking and then wanting to see the next movie created by them and figure out the next piece in the puzzle. The way that the audience reacts to the media, however, can be different. The way that the creator wants them too, as it should be, there are viewers who scrap that method and creates their own meaning for the media. Not taking in what the creator had envisioned initially. The final, being the best of both are the viewers that accepts parts of the media but then has their own views on other parts.

These two elements can almost come together in how the audience reacts to all movies whether that being the original or the sequel.

The Opinion

In the film industry reviews are crucial in getting a public on movies and seeing the two sides of how a story can be perceived and whether it was thoroughly enjoyed or wasn't taken by the viewer. From the movies mentioned in this writing there have been many reviews written on them with an array of opinions on them. Roger Ebert (2001) reviews Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs 2001 in calling it a Great Movie. Describing the way in which Walt Disney had created such frames that were immensely detailed compared to past pieces and the innovations that he took to create the movie. "Nothing like the techniques in "Snow White" had been seen before." Studying body language in order to create characters to express their personality without relying on comedy. A subject greatly used in the past of animation. Praising the movie as a masterpiece, comparing it to a jewel in Disney's crown.

An example of review that praises the movie and highlights how it was a major step in the film industry and was then a great lead to creating future movies.

For The Guardian, Peter Bradshaw (2018) a film critic has reviewed many of the movies written in this piece. Inducing Coco, describing how it has some rarities that other films don't have such as a real third act and an interesting ending. Also mentioning that it is a film that stands out in the more recent work of Pixar and compares it to the previous movie Up. Calling it a memorable film, this film is something that Pixar needed in order to make a comeback in the animation industry and this review describes that in its writing. "This might start bringing Pixar studios back from the dead." Showing that it does stand out to others how Pixar had taken a step back and wasn't creating the originals of a quality from years ago.

Peter Bradshaw (2019) continues his reviewing on Toy Story 4. Pointing out that it is the fourth instalment and that it seems to be repeating itself. "But this movie is fundamentally repeating itself: repeating characters, ideas and plotlines – even if it does it with buoyancy and charm." Pointing out how the previous two Toy Story's include the storylines of how the toys feel and bringing in the audience as they would have grown up and moved on from their toys. Flipping the perspective to the toy itself and how it feels. Bringing in the subject on how the toys should age with the movies but yet still remain pristine. Whether this is a flaw in creation or a strategic idea to keep the films on going is up for debate. "Their mortality as objects was a real issue that has been sidestepped here." Even though this movie did bring in new features and more elements on gender equality and balance, the review mentions that even though the film isn't a bad movie, but it is time for Pixar to move on from this franchise.

Another reviewer Dan Jolin (2019), reviews Toy Story 4 and calls Pixar brave for creating the fourth instalment. Calling it "the strongest fourth series instalment since Mad Max: Fury Road." However, the review still does add that it doesn't have the emotion that the two previous movies had. "It might not take us to the epic highs of its predecessors" A continuing theme with the new creation. Feeling less essential in the series. The review does argue that it does have grown up themes with the bringing back of Bo Peep and how she chooses to be dependent instead of being owned by a child. This could relate to the fact the audience watching this movie would include those who have grown up with this series and can relate to such a theme.

Returning to Peter Bradshaw (2018), he has also reviewed Ralph Breaks the Internet and calls the movie a tiresome arcade game re-run. Being a lot harsher in this review compared to the last, this is an example of how a sequel can be taken in a bad way and not enjoyed. Calling it exhaustingly pointless, destruction for winners, not losers this review doesn't take to this movie. It brings up the topic that this movie was made as a way to show how we are all on the internet and how it can be brought up to the big screen. "The internet has broken Ralph." Comparing it to Inside Out, saying how that movie had a stronger connection to the world, saying that Ralph is different but in a negative opinion.

Putting it all together it shows that reviews can be used for both good and bad reasons. Starting with saying how innovative the film is and how it added to the film industry. Pointing out the certain aspects that grabbed attention and drew the audience in. Giving praise to the storyline and how if the movie was a series it had connection and the characters continued the story and kept the film feeling fresh but still familiar. On the other hand, reviews can be used to rip into the movie and point out how the reviewer dislikes the movie and why they have chosen to write such a review. Using the platform to spit out opinion that may not please everyone but still gives a fresh look to film that may be liked by many. With reviews it can cause a lot of opinion on whether the reader agrees or disagrees with it. Many chose to have an opinion on a film from just a review and not from watching the movie itself. When a movie has a bad review written about it stands out more than if a good review was also written for it. As the audience wouldn't want to watch movie if someone doesn't recommend it. However, this can cause arguments from if a reader doesn't agree with what is written and doesn't listen to what the reviewer says and gives their own opinion. With major films this cause controversy with being someone that disagrees with liking the movie. However, with movies made from famous studios the audience may choose to like the film because of where it was made and not from focusing on the story itself. Studios like Disney and Pixar could create stories and characters that may not stand out as much as others, but a certain amount will choose to like the movie no matter the quality and chose to argue with those that don't like the movie and express that to others.

Conclusion

In assessing the journey from the original character to their final 3D forms there is plenty to debate on whether the process is done correctly and liked by all without any issue and no space for further conjecture. The answer can range from all angles as the subject itself is very diverse when giving an explanation. When designing a character, the concept can look perfect at first glance but when the creation takes place to its final model and giving it the character that was drawn out, it can get lost and lose itself with trying to create a good looking model or trying to give the audience what is thought to be the best. However, in this process the thought put into it may be in the wrong areas. Seeing in *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, a perfect example of how the recreation of old character can be divided by the audience in terms of what is good and what is not. All characters were made in representation of the original, but some had lost their characteristics that was loved in their original form. The argument could be that they creators were trying to make a more up to date and modern version of the characters. Trying to keep to the style that Disney has made for themselves today. However, the argument still stands on whether they were successful in this area alone. In terms of story and how it has developed over the years it can be divided into two, one being that the audience always wants to see something new in film and wants to be surprised and caught off guard by the characters and their actions. However, there is also the side of companies taking advantage of creating sequels to their famous movies and knowing that the audience will come back to observe the development of the story and seeing their favourite characters live their lives as the audience themselves also grow up. Seeing the development of how they can relate to the story more and more as they grow up as they learn to empathise with the characters even more. Overall, the audience still grows with the story whether that being a sequel or an original. The range of age can still provide the different viewpoints without having to make multiple versions of one story. The reviews being examples of how an opinion can vary on just one movie alone. The entire audience will never be pleased but that doesn't mean that the movie will not be watched and criticised.

To finalize a character can be made to look exactly how the creator wants it to be and give it the personality that was initially intended by them. However, it is then the audience that can decide whether they actually followed the design as they had intended. As well as the story, in creation the writer may think that an award-winning story has been created however, once seen and criticised by the audience it is them who determine whether it is successful or not. The entirety of the film's being is down to the audience and how the creator is able to communicate to them correctly and give them what they want. This, an idea that will never be fully achieved.

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